

**STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH H. RICHARD  
AMBASSADORIAL NOMINEE TO LEBANON  
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

**March 10, 2016**

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored by President Obama's decision to nominate me as U.S. ambassador to Lebanon. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Members of this Committee on achieving our policy objectives in Lebanon.

Over the course of my 30 years as a Foreign Service Officer, I have had the privilege of serving in some of our most challenging posts, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and – most recently – Yemen. In my diplomatic efforts to advance U.S. policy objectives, as well as in overseeing security assistance, counter-narcotics, economic and governance programs, I have seen firsthand how influential the United States can be when it engages. The effects of the crises raging across the Middle East on our national interests make U.S. leadership more imperative than ever.

The Middle East is undergoing a period of unprecedented instability. The roots of this instability are deep and systemic: weak political legitimacy, ineffective institutions, fragile economies, and religious sectarianism. Amidst this backdrop of uncertainty, the resilience of the Lebanese people stands out. For centuries, Lebanon has been a rich tapestry of different religions and ethnicities. Respect for religious freedom and confessional tolerance lie at the very core of Lebanese identity. We must do all we can to help Lebanon continue to uphold these principles. If confirmed as ambassador, I will dedicate myself to further strengthening our partnership with Lebanon.

Lebanon today faces three major challenges: the spillover effects of the conflict in Syria, which has brought more than a million refugees to Lebanon; a political crisis that has severely hindered the work of government institutions and has deprived the Lebanese people of basic services; and – of course – the activities of Hizballah, a terrorist organization that puts its own interests and those of its foreign backers ahead of the Lebanese people. Our partnership with Lebanon's legitimate state institutions and our assistance to the Lebanese people are essential in helping Lebanon address all three of these challenges.

I am struck by the incredible generosity of towns and villages all across Lebanon in welcoming more than a million Syrian refugees. And I am very proud of the generosity of the American people as well. Our assistance to Syrian refugees – and the Lebanese communities which have graciously hosted them for nearly five years – has helped to alleviate the tremendous burden on the country. Just last month in London, Secretary Kerry announced over \$133 million in new humanitarian aid, bringing the U.S. contribution to Lebanon to over \$1.1 billion since the start of the crisis. The Department is grateful to Congress for supporting this assistance, which demonstrates America's unwavering resolve in addressing one of the most heart wrenching situations in the world today. If confirmed, I will work hard to help Lebanon address this enormous humanitarian challenge.

Extremist groups such as ISIL and the Nusra Front pose a grave threat to Lebanon, and to U.S. interests in the region. Our partnership with Lebanon's security forces has played a critical role in preserving Lebanon's security against such threats. Lebanon is also a member of the Counter-ISIL Coalition we lead. If confirmed, I will do my best to build upon our strong relationships with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces. The November 12 bombing in Beirut, which killed 41 innocent civilians and injured many more, is a tragic reminder of the threat posed by ISIL. I was moved to learn that the U.S. Congress observed a moment of silence on the floor soon after the attack. This gesture showed that the American people stand shoulder to shoulder with the Lebanese as they battle ISIL and other extremists.

With the generous support of the Congress, we are supporting the Lebanese military with the tools and training it needs to fight ISIL and other extremists. Our security assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces, more than \$150 million in fiscal year 2015, makes a real difference on the ground. The Lebanese military has turned the tide against ISIL along the rugged border with Syria, so that northeastern Lebanon is no longer in immediate danger from extremist groups. Lebanese aircraft now use U.S.-supplied Hellfire missiles to pinpoint terrorists and take them out. Our partnership with the Lebanese Internal Security Forces is no less impressive. For example, FBI-trained Internal Security Forces now conduct forensic investigations to help bring justice for the Lebanese people in cases of terrorist attacks and serious crimes.

Effective security needs to be buttressed by effective political leadership. Lebanon has been without a president for almost two years – much too long. Now is the time for Lebanon to uphold its democratic principles and elect a president according to the Lebanese constitution. The Lebanese people deserve a government that can deliver basic services, promote economic prosperity, and address the country's most pressing security challenges. The United States has been clear and consistent: Lebanon needs a president and a fully functioning Cabinet and parliament without delay. This is first and foremost a Lebanese responsibility; they are the ones who have the greatest stake in their country's success. Through our leadership in the International Support Group for Lebanon, the United States has rallied the international community to speak with a united voice in calling for an end to the presidential vacancy. If confirmed, I will dedicate myself to supporting the Lebanese in their efforts to seat a functioning government.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Lebanon's voices for moderation and progress to support Lebanon's quest for full sovereignty and independence. Hizballah's ongoing intervention in Syria to prop up the Assad regime – undertaken without the consent of the Lebanese people – contradicts the 2012 Baabda Declaration, which clearly – and wisely – states Lebanon's policy of dissociation from foreign entanglements. Hizballah's activities in Syria create serious security challenges for Lebanon. If confirmed, my mission will be to do everything I can to support Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty throughout the country and to help build up the Lebanese military, its sole legitimate defender.

The Administration strongly supported the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act passed by the Congress last December. We have made clear to all that our goal is to dismantle Hizballah's international financial network while supporting Lebanese institutions and the Lebanese people. This will contribute directly to promoting Lebanon's economic prosperity.

The success of the Lebanese banking sector, a backbone of the country's economy, relies on upholding an already excellent reputation. Both Lebanon and the United States have an interest in ensuring Hizballah cannot penetrate the Lebanese financial sector. If confirmed, I will dedicate myself to working with the Lebanese financial sector to enhance our anti-money laundering and terrorism finance cooperation.

Our commitment to Lebanon's economic prosperity is one of the cornerstones of our bilateral relationship. From university scholarships that foster a new generation of Lebanese entrepreneurs to water and sanitation projects for rural communities, our assistance helps Lebanon deal with the economic fallout of a region in turmoil. If confirmed, I hope to expand trade between Lebanon and the United States and to promote U.S. exports to Lebanon. Lebanon's accession to the World Trade Organization would be a positive development and we stand ready to help better connect Lebanon to the global economy.

Most importantly – I want to remember that Lebanon is hallowed ground for America's diplomats and our colleagues in uniform. The tragic bombings of the Marine barracks and the U.S Embassy in Beirut in 1983 will never be forgotten. If confirmed, my highest priority will be the safety and security of all Americans in Lebanon. There is no job more important to me.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for this opportunity to address you. If confirmed, I look forward to seeing you and members of your staff in Beirut. I welcome the opportunity to address any questions you might have. Thank you.

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